

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

GULZAR



This is your 15th Filmfare trophy. Do you value it as much as say your first award?

Of course. The value hasn't reduced one bit. It's an award for excellence and I appreciate that. Though I do feel that the award today isn't as competitive as it used to be.

Earlier, getting a nomination was like winning the award itself. Even the quality of talent around has depreciated.

Another thing I have noticed is that the importance of technical awards has gone down tremendously. The star acts have gained importance. I guess that's because the awards show has to generate revenue today.

Any other changes?

Yes. Earlier you had statesmen like Morarji Desai, Atal Behari Vajpayee and The President of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser presiding over the function. In that sense, it's been a comedown in stature.

The award categories have multiplied over the years. Today, you cater to the maximum. Short of giving the award for location hunting, you have an award for everything else. Earlier, the best song award was based on lyrics.

Today, of course, like everything else, instant consumption is the criteria for all the awards. Personally, I've received a lot of respect and love from Filmfare. I have no cause to complain.

Do you have memories of the first award you received?

Yes. I won the Best Dialogue Award for *Anand* in 1971. I was so nervous that I didn't go to the awards function. I was in Panchgani shooting for *Parichay* with Jaya (Bachchan). I could have easily come.

But I made all sorts of excuses to stay away. I was scared of going on stage to receive my trophy.

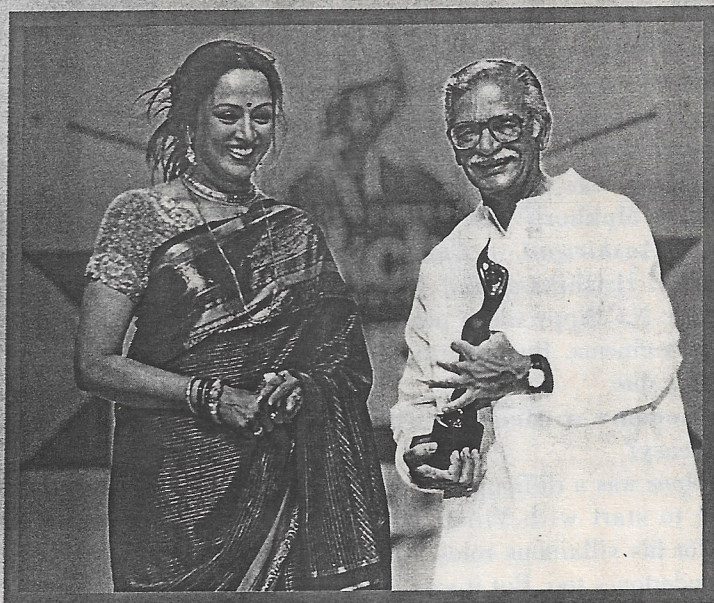
I asked Jaya, who was attending the function, to

accept it for me.

When I won my second award for *Aandhi* in 1975, I summoned up courage and attended the show. Those days, the winners would sit on the stage. So all you needed was to take seven steps (*Saptapadi*) to receive your award.

Today, the audience can see your trembling knees as you make your way to the stage. (*Laughs*) Every appearance on the stage is like a film scene today.

Have you ever looked back and wondered about the way life has progressed? Weren't you a mechanic in a garage once?



With Hema Malini

I wasn't a mechanic. I used to mix colours to match the shades of the cars that had met with an accident. I had a natural talent for this. I took up the job because it gave me ample time to read and write. I used to work in journalist Pammi Bakshi's uncle's garage.

How did the movies happen?

I had many friends in the Indian People's Theatre Association and Progressive Writers' Association like Salil Chowdhury, Shailendra, Sanjeev Kumar, Kaifi Azmi, Ali Sardar Jaffri and Majrooh Sultanpuri. Frankly, I wasn't interested in joining the movies. Literature was a passion with me.

Sachinda (Burman) had some *naraazgi* with Shailendra. So Bimalda was looking for some-

one new to write the lyrics for *Bandini*. I knew Debu Sen who asked me to meet Bimalda. But I didn't want to go. Shailendra coaxed me to go. I wrote *Mora gora ang laile. Uske baad*, Shailendra made up with S.D. Burman. And I was out.

But Bimalda felt bad for me. He felt that I'd given him good songs, so I shouldn't be left out in the cold. But I wasn't interested in becoming a lyricist. He wanted to know what I was doing with my life. He told me the garage was no place for me. He literally pulled me out. I became his assistant. I was adamant about not joining the movies and writing lyrics. And I have got the maximum recognition in this field. Isn't that ironical?

It must have been quite an experience working with Bimal Roy.

Those were undoubtedly the finest years of my life. Bimalda was such an affectionate man and such a fine human being. Even today when two people from the BRP (Bimal Roy Productions) meet, their topic of discussion is Bimal Roy. Everyone from his actors, assistants, spot boys, dressmen to technicians simply loved him. When Bimalda died, Hemant Kumar provided every unit member of BRP with a job. I was one of them. That's how I started writing for outside productions.

You made a successful team with Hrishikesh Mukherjee and N.C. Sippy.

If Bimalda was the principal of our school, Hrishikesh Mukherji was the *masterji*. I wrote *Anand*, *Aashirwad*, *Guddi*, *Khubsoorat*, *Bawarchi*... Hrishikesh and N.C. Sippy made a great team. N.C. Sippy was a pioneer of the middle-of-the-path cinema. But unfortunately he never received his due.

You became a director with *Mere Apne*. Was it easy?

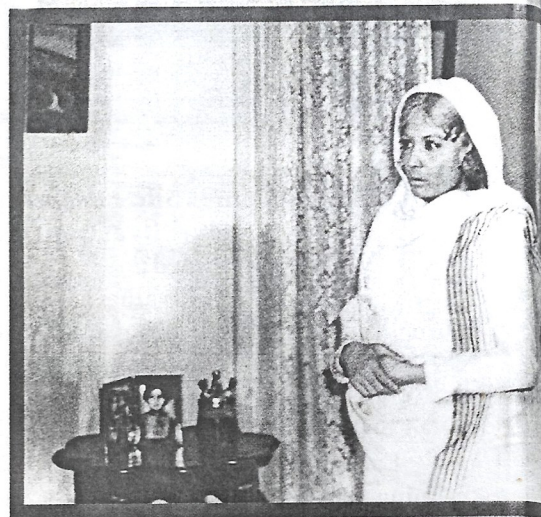
Mere Apne was a difficult film to make. It had no heroine to start with. Vinod Khanna was more known for his villainous roles. The movie had political undertones too. But it was an experience. Till *Kitaab*, I felt that my films were too verbose. I guess that happens to most writers. The changeover was a bit difficult. It took me time to learn the medium. I felt I came into my own with *Kitaab*.

As a director, you were associated with a certain clique of actors and technicians. Was it because you were comfortable working with them?

Most definitely. Sanjeev Kumar and R.D. Burman were my anchors. I'd met Sanjeev at IPTA. He was doing the play *All My Sons*. He must have been only 23 or 24 but he played the old man with so much conviction. Leela Chitnis played his wife.

Whatever I wrote, Sanjeev had to be in it. There was no two ways about that. Jaya (Bachchan) and he were the only two artistes who could rise above the script. They improvised on my scenes beautifully. After Meena Kumari, Jaya was responsible for changing the hyped image of the heroine to the girl-next-door.

R.D. decorated the most unusual of my poetry with his music. Only R.D. could have



Mere Apne



Khushboo

done it. I worked successfully with other music directors like Salil Chowdhury and Madan Mohan too. But Pancham was the best for me.

Who are the other actors you've admired most?

Hema Malini was a directors' actress. She was very malleable. Whatever you told her, she would imbibe it so fast. I met her on the sets of *Andaz*. Her Hindi wasn't polished. She told me that whatever she does in life, she will always remain a dancer... that she will always give dance performances. Twenty years down, she has achieved that. What I admire most about Hema Malini is that



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she has led her life with conviction. She's a feminist, a truly liberated woman. And she has done it without slogans.

Please go on.

After Sanjeev, the other actor I admire the most is Naseeruddin Shah. I worked with him in *Mirza Ghalib* and *Libaas*. He is the only actor who could really, really inspire me. I was awed by his immense talent while working with him. None can compare with him. He is the best. Isn't it sad that after doing movies like *Sparsh*, *Paar* and *Pestonjee*, he was known for

in 1947 and the rest in 1984. I wanted him to say it in a dry way. But he'd get choked. We did several retakes. That line affected him so much. One thing about Om is that he doesn't need costumes, hairdos to get into a character. I'm glad that he's making his mark in international cinema. It's really frustrating when such actors don't get their due.

You worked well with Jeetendra too.

I worked with him in three movies, *Khushboo*, *Parichay* and *Kinara*. And I think he was very good in all of them. In *Parichay*, when I gave him a moustache, he was very uncomfortable. And when I added the glasses in *Khushboo*, it was just too much. He was apprehensive that he wouldn't be accepted. That his women fans would run away. I thought he looked respectable. His energy amazed me. That's what carried him through. *Aisa lagta tha ki koi generator laga ho us mein*.

You've worked with the best of actors in Hindi cinema.

Yes. I found Shabana Azmi hard working. She carried her script and remembered it.

Of the present-day performers, I would rate Tabu very highly. She found her potential with *Maachis*. She'll be the actress of this era. But we need to write scripts for her.

Chandrachur Singh showed a lot potential. But I guess he wanted to be what he was not. He didn't handle his career correctly.

Of all the actors I have spoken about, I would place Amitabh Bachchan above all. He's a complete actor. He's an actor and a star. He's simply superb. There's nothing he can't do. He's one man who could have changed the face of parallel cinema. I guess he didn't particularly like that kind of cinema.

How was it working with A.R. Rahman?

Working with him in *Dil Se* was a new experience for me. He is a milestone in Hindi film music. He has single-handedly changed the sound of music in the movies. He has even changed the format of songs which was stuck in a groove of *mukhda-antara*. His new format has brought it closer to poems of free verse.

Another music director I admire greatly is Vishaal Bharadwaj. He's one of the few composers who understand poetry. He's a man of melody. But unfortunately, he isn't interested in music. He's moved to direction.

And Anu Malik?

I've done about four films with Anu. He has inherited music from his father Sardar Malik. Anu has the capability of being better than everyone. But he sadly lacks discipline which is very important.

(Smiles) He can never keep quiet for more than five minutes. He'll burst if he has to keep his mouth

shut. The problem with Anu is that he can't survive if he doesn't talk and if he talks, no one else can get a word in.

If you were asked to pick your five favourite movies, which would they be?

Ijaazat for the consistency of screenplay,



Aandhi



Maachis

the *Oye oye* song?

I worked with Om Puri in *Maachis* and earlier in a TV serial *Kirdaar*. Another fine actor. In *Maachis*, he had to say some lines about how he lost half his family

Namkeen for its screenplay and its characterisations, *Angoor* for simply freaking out, *Lekin* for Manmohan Singh's stirring visuals and *Maachis* for its relevance of history.

You've been a lyricist, dialogue-writer, screenplay writer, director and a poet. What have you enjoyed doing the most?

Outside the movies, I've loved writing poems. I also enjoy writing for children. When you're writing, you are all by yourself. You aren't plugged to a demand wire.

How have you kept going when your contemporaries have fallen by the wayside?

I don't think many have. But there is a change in the work pace. If you see my career-graph, you will find that I once used to make a film every year. But in the last decade, I've just made two movies. I haven't been prolific.

Frankly, if I wasn't in the movies, no one would pay me even Rs.1,000. The only job I'd probably get is outside the post office writing letters. In today's times, even that would be difficult to find.

But you can't deny that your name is associated with quality.

(Smiles). You have to stay honest to your roots. The moment you leave your roots and start floating, you'll be washed down the drain.

You've often been accused of ignoring all grammatical rules while writing. How do you react to such criticism?

See, I have no qualms about going off metre if it helps the music director. Because I believe that since the songs are written on tunes, it's the music which becomes the metre. Sahir Ludhianvi was probably the only poet whose songs could stand by themselves without any music.

In Hindi movies, we are used to a certain arrangement of words like *deewana*, *mastana*. Most songs have limited words which are repeated often. My attempt has been to find new words and use them differently. Maybe that has bothered the so-called purists. I remember I was criticised for *Humne dekhi hai un ankhon ki mahekti khushboo*. They asked, "*Ankhon se khushboo kaise aa sakti hai?*" But it's only a matter of one's sensibility. If blooming looks aren't fragrant, then what is?

But there have been times when criticism has been justified. And I've accepted it. Recently, Ashaji (Bhosle) told me that Majrooh Sultanpuri had once pointed out one of my mistakes to her.

I'd written *Tere pankhon pe moti jadoo*. He apparently said, "*Heere jade jaate hain aur moti lagaye jaate hain.*" I wasn't aware of this distinction. I acknowledged my mistake.

How do you view Meghna's debut film *Filhaal*?

Honestly, I feel it's an intelligent film. She's done a good job. Of course, we'd have been happier if it had done well at the box office too.

Apart from that, *Filhaal* is a serious attempt at meaningful cinema. The movie depicts



Bosky's point of view. I'm glad she's made a film after her own convictions. It's not flippant. It's one of those rare movies that talk of female bonding. People can expect her to make movies of substance.

How different are today's film-makers from the directors of yesteryear?

The present generation isn't inhibited. The honesty in their relationship shows through. If *Filhaal* had been made during our times, the relationship between the couples would have been mired in suspicion. We made movies like *Dil Ek Mandir* and *Aap Ki Kasam*. The present generation is more honest and transparent in their relationships and that shows in the movies.

I saw that in *Dil Chahta Hai* too. I respect the present generation for that.



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